Towards an Archeology of the Soul



A PARATHEATRICAL WORKBOOK

Antero Alli & Friends

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In Gratitude To...

DAVID ROSENBLOOM
for initiating the values of No-Form and Polarizations
KEITH BERGER
for our formative friendship and your early mime training
THE CHAMBER THEATRE TROUPE (1977-79)
for launching the early performance rituals
CAMILLE HILDEBRANDT
for extending this work to unforeseen kinetic heights
SYLVI ALLI
for our friendship, your love and commitment to our work
JULIAN SIMEON
for your integrity, friendship and faith in the work
NICK WALKER
for your impeccable integration of the work
JERZY GROTOWSKI
for your trailblazing illuminations of objective ritual
JANE BROWN
for introducing the values of relaxation and gravity
ANTONIN ARTAUD
for burning your tragic flaws so brightly
WILLIAM BLAKE
for so vividly envisioning the archetypes next door
DR. JOSE ARGUELLES
for rekindling my faith in the Earth and beyond
DR. CARL G. JUNG
for the seminal studies on alchemical process
KENDALL KATZE
for your inspired guidance during a critical turning point

NO-FORM *for keeping everything in perspective*

for Kallista

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The life of Fire comes from the death of Earth
The life of Air comes from the death of Fire
The life of Water comes from the death of Air
The life of Earth comes from the death of Water
Form lives in the Light and dies in the Shadows
Life lives in the Shadows and dies in the Light.

anonymous alchemist

FOREWORD

I sit down to write an introduction to Antero's book, *Towards an Archeology of the Soul*, but where do I begin from? The pressures of my life are overwhelming. Yet facing this task, I sense a demand for my full attention. What is my aim here? Who am I right now?

I stop and collect myself. Breathe. My posture becomes straighter. My rhythm slows down. There is a stillness. I am aware, in this moment, of subtle movements of energy within and without my being. My idea of myself gives way to something infinitely greater. The quality of this experience is equal to, if not surpassing, the effort to write. I have a sensation of presence and, at the same time, I am writing. A wish arises in me to be of service to something higher. I straddle two worlds now; two directions. One is oriented inwardly and one, outwardly. This is the place from which I can begin. This is the place I will return to.

Antero uses the term, *No-Form.* Call it what you will, the words do not matter. this a book of action, a book of experience. From No-Form Antero begins. To No-Form he returns. No-Form guides his search; it emboldens him, and substantiates his experience. There are precious few who have devoted themselves to an exploration of life in art; fewer, still who have approached their quest with balance and integrity. We honor those who have come before us, and must give special recognition to Jerzy Grotowski, one of my own teachers, who originated the term, *paratheatrical*, two and a half decades ago. We must also honor those who continue in this lineage and take on the task of transmission.

Transmission is what *Archeology of the Soul* is all about. If he could, Antero would transmit directly to you, energetically, through sweat and tears, through breath and muscle. As it is, he does exactly that in his workshops, performances, and labs, but here, he dares to put a teaching into words. Words. How is this possible? The work documented here is largely non-verbal. People write about their experiences here years after the fact and words often fail them. How can a flame be put into words?

This is an act of folly. It is fraught with impossibilities. It is doomed to failure. Firstly, the teaching Antero presents is forever changing, evolving. It is organic. Secondly, it is his uniquely specific path, created by him, for himself. Lastly, unless one already has an inkling of what a living ritual can be, reading this text is mere voyeurism.

However, there are exceptions. There always are exceptions. If one resonates to the ideas and experiences presented here, one may begin a journey of one's own. One may have even already begun such a journey and find in this book a verification, a confirmation of efforts and struggles that, until now, have been nameless. One may be inspired to look for others who share a similar vision of art, or concern for self. One may seek out a real teacher. A "teacher." Another word. Certainly this describes Antero, but we must qualify the term. For me, a teacher, in the most efficacious example, is one who imparts knowledge while engaged in a continuing personal search for knowledge. This definition would not apply to most who call themselves *teachers*. It would apply to Antero Alli.

Antero, in describing one of his lab experiences, says that he prefers the mountain metaphor. He continues, "...here was this group on the way up to their own existential peak, to discover the edge of whatever they are living for..." If I may continue with the analogy, I could say that Antero is more aptly a sherpa, a mountain guide. He has traversed many paths on the mountain. He has created some of his own paths. He has explored routes that he later discarded and ones that he now knows well enough to travel along with eyes closed. He has hiked with others in his care. In fact, he has found that his own journey is greatly assisted by climbing with fellow alpinists. His expertise and sense of responsibility makes him a well-trusted guide. In leading, he sees that his own progress is dependent on each person's ascension in line. The entire expedition is tethered together and, as one steps up, the next takes his place. Antero has climbed higher than most. He has glimpsed the summit. He knows the direction and his aim is true.

In a way, we who commit to a life in search, are all fellow climbers. At the base of the mountain we pitch camp in different locales and climates. We may not even know of each other's existence. But as we ascend, our experiences become more and more synonymous. And as we approach the summit, very little separates us from each other. At this point in the journey it becomes increasingly vital that we pay careful attention to the one who precedes us, and to the one who follows directly behind. As Antero is fond of saying, "Read that last sentence again."

Now, return to No-Form.

Matt Mitler, Director
Theatre Group Dzieci
New York City, September 3, 2003



Author Introduction
"The Five Sections in this Book"

Originally published in 1987 (after ten years of doing this work) under the title, *All Rites Reversed: Ritual Technology for Self-Initiation,* this book remained in print for twelve years before it was discontinued by the publisher (Falcon Press). Since this first edition, sixteen years of active paratheatrical research has compelled the revisions in this updated volume. This book was originally written as a workbook to accompany a minority of self-motivated individuals experimenting in private, non-performance "group ritual labs" towards greater flexibility in the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual bodies. Though most people did this work for personal, spiritual and non-public reasons, I continued applying the results to the scripting and production of a series of performance works, stageplays and feature-length dv-films (1977 to present). It is in this spirit of creative application that this abridged edition is offered. Note: though most of the writing in the first three Sections address group dynamics in this medium, many of these rituals can be also be applied and appreciated in solitude, given that the high levels of commitment and preparation required can be implemented alone.

<u>Section 1: The Syllabus</u> contains the nuts and bolts of this ritual medium, complete unto itself with its own principles and techniques, alongside new material for developing performance works. Actors, dancers and other performing artists can use the methods in this syllabus to augment whatever forms of movement, theatre, or performance they're already developing or, set aside the time to explore this work on its own merits. Non-performing ritualists and artists of all persuasions can use this medium to spark their creative imaginations and excite more emotional honesty in their work. Those living outside these categories may find use in questioning commonly held assumptions about the nature of ritual, the living earth and dreams.

Section 2: Lab Reports begins a series of revelations resulting from my own personal experiences in this medium and continues with stories from seven other participants (Theresa Laughinghare, Douglass Truth, Troy Skeels, Sylvi Alli, Joshua Levitt, JS Laughter, and Nick Walker) spanning over twenty years in ritual lab work.

Section 3: Dreams & Psychic Projections introduces two unique and very different ways to experience the energy and mystery of dreams while in the waking state. Both approaches are non-psychological, insofar as they bypass any pursuit of meaning and both are emotionally engaging due to the highly personal nature of each ritual. They are included here to demonstrate, and invite your participation in, some of the harvest from this paratheatrical research. Serene Zloof also shares her experiences with one of these rituals ("Temple of the Animus") from her work in the Anima/ Animus Lab (Spring 2001).

Section 4: The Living Earth features ideas and techniques of other talented ritualists whose deep devotion to the Earth has inspired a shamanistic bias in this medium. Richard feather Anderson ("Geomancy"), an internationally known geomancer (and faerie soul) brought me to a natural stone circle on a Marin county hilltop and showed me how to feel for leylines, a memory and skill that'll stay with me for a long time. During a sabbatical in the seaside village of Pacific Grove, California, I had the good fortune to meet up with ceremonial magickian, Kevin A. Lewis ("On Temple Construction") whose encyclopedic occult mind was cheerfully capped by a great wit and wicked sense of humor. Besides being one of my oldest friends, Julian Simeon ("Wilderness Rites of Passage") is also part of a small circle who have known all three levels of work in this medium (Initiations, Shadow Work and Distillations). All the participants who have contributed here have influenced the shape and substance of this medium by their unique talents, disciplines and perspectives. Julian's experience as a wilderness guide has infused his participation in this work with a unique survivalist integrity, reminding me of our vital relation with the earth.

Section 5: Artist Interviews follow a journey from shamanism to ritual to theatre through the work of six highly talented individuals who have directly and indirectly influenced this paratheatrical medium. In 1986 Guboo Ted Thomas ("Aboriginal Dreamtime"), an elder from the Australian aboriginal Yuin tribe, granted me an unexpected initiation in the guise of an interview, a shock that eventually inspired the dreaming rituals outlined in this book. Last year Guboo passed over to the dreamtime forever, reminding me of what he said in our final moments together, "the best is yet to come." Though I never met Elizabeth Cogburn in person ("Ecstatic Rites & Warnings"), her reputation precedes her as a wizened leader of a longstanding ceremonial practice of her own design. Though the outer form of our ritual mediums differ wildly, I was warmed by the underlying values they shared. I met with Paul Oertel ("Voice as Instrument") while living in Boulder CO and was astonished by his visceral vocal artistry as a dancer and by the compassion he showed in his teaching processes. Keith Berger ("Group Performance Dynamics"), a professional mime theatre artist and a very early inspiration to my work, shares his typically uncanny insights into directing groups; perspectives that continue to spark how I direct actors to this day. I met Fred Curchack ("Solo Performance Work") in 1982 while we were both teaching at Sonoma State and was blown away by his solo initiatic performances. In 1976, artist/composer David Rosenbloom ("The Alembic of No-Form to Form") first initiated me to the core principles that eventually led to the development of this work.

After twenty-six years, this paratheatrical medium has made significant advances yet still remains very much in process, as I hope it will be for many years to come. This was never meant to be a solo endeavor nor am I a solo artist or ritualist. Without the participation and inspired support of hundreds of individuals, it would never have happened. I remain grateful to you all and to everyone else who believed in me, in this work and in themselves long enough to discover firsthand what this work is and can be.

Antero Alli
Autumn 2003
Berkeley CA USA